



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

February 10, 2004

BILL NELSON
FLORIDA

President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The deteriorating conditions in Hispaniola are of great concern to the people of the state of Florida and must be immediately addressed by the U.S. government. The worsening violence, subversion of constitutional processes and absence of rule of law threaten the stability of the Caribbean region, and democracy itself. Urgent and sustained attention must be given by the administration.

Of utmost concern is the situation in Haiti, a country for which the United States has no discernible plan because our bilateral relations are adrift. Since the disputed parliamentary elections of May 2000, there has been a political stalemate which has ground the government to a halt, and has deprived the Haitian people of critical services. I had the privilege to join a Congressional delegation led Sen. Mike DeWine in January 2003, and carry with me the images of the suffering population.

The Organization of American States (OAS), with U.S. facilitation, passed Resolutions 822 and 1959 calling for support from the international community, "to maintain its support for the OAS Special Mission and provide urgent additional funds," for assistance. However, the United States has taken only meager steps to assist the people of Haiti. I appreciate the efforts of the administration to provide some assistance through nongovernment organizations and to advance economic ties between Haiti and the international financial institutions. But this is simply not enough.

First, we must stop the killings, gang activity and subversions of law in Haiti. The United States should rally the OAS Special Mission and OAS member nations to provide resources for a contingent of international civilian police to be deployed throughout the country. The U.S. should work specifically with France and Canada in an effort to stabilize the situation and, over the medium term, reorganize and restructure the Haitian National Police. When the Haitian people may live and assemble in peace, we may reasonably consider moving ahead with the necessary democratic election process, perhaps with the assistance of former President Jimmy Carter and the Carter Center. President Carter has had a positive impact previously intervening in Haiti.

Long-range planning should include increased U.S. assistance to Haiti from U.S.A.I.D., specifically to assist small business and industry development, microenterprises, and democracy building efforts. These efforts should also include action on S. 489, the Haiti Recovery and Opportunity Act, which would create tens of thousands of new jobs in Haiti. Your administration has not taken a position on this legislation.

This situation in the Dominican Republic also is of great concern. Protests, demonstrations, and general strikes threaten law and order. The OAS is well-suited to assist with such problems there, and U.S. assistance should be commensurately bolstered for such efforts. Taking these steps now is far preferable than reaping the possible consequences we may face later, as elections approach in that country in May of this year.

Mr. President, we can neither ill-afford to fail in our efforts to build democracy and the rule of law in our own hemisphere. I applauded, and agreed with, your Jan. 12, 2004 statement at the Summit of the Americas when you said, "The essential foundations of prosperity and progress remain democracy and the rule of law... At past summits, we resolved that democracy is the only legitimate form of government in this hemisphere, and that the peoples of the Americas have an obligation to promote it and defend it. Those governments in our hemisphere that have responded by supporting democracy can be proud. Our unity and support of democratic institutions, constitutional processes and basic liberties gives hope and strength to those struggling to preserve their God-given rights, whether in Venezuela, or Haiti, or Bolivia."

It is now time to act, and I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Bill Nelson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping tail on the final "n".